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Jim Crow THEN & NOW

by Nicholas Powers, p8



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THE INDYPENDENT, INC.
666 BROADWAY, SUITE 510
NEW YORK, NY 10012

PHONE: (212) 904-1282

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Ellen Davidson, Anna Gold,
Arun Gupta, John Tarleton

SENIOR EDITOR/COORDINATOR:
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ILLUSTRATION COORDINATOR:

Frank Reynoso

PHOTO COORDINATOR:

Amelia Holowaty Krales

DESIGNERS:

Steven Arnerich, Anna Gold,
Mikael Tarkela

INTERNS:

Isabelle Nastasia

GENERAL INQUIRIES:

contact@indypendent.org

SUBMISSIONS AND NEWS TIPS:

submissions@indypendent.org

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND DONATIONS:

indypendent.org/donate

ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION:

ads@indypendent.org

READER COMMENTS:

letters@indypendent.org

VOLUNTEER:

volunteer@indypendent.org

INDYKIDS:

info@indykids.org

The Independent is a New York-based free newspaper published 13 times a year on Mondays for our print and online readership of more than 100,000. It is produced by a network of volunteers who report, write, edit, draw, design, take photos, distribute, fundraise and provide website management. Since 2000, more than 700 journalists, artists and media activists have participated in this project. Winner of more than 50 New York Community Media Alliance awards, *The Independent* is funded by subscriptions, reader donations, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising. We accept submissions that look at news and culture through a critical lens, exploring how systems of power — economic, political and social — affect the lives of people locally and globally. *The Independent* reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

The Independent is affiliated with the New York City Independent Media Center, which is part of the global Indymedia movement, an international network dedicated to fostering grassroots media production, and with *IndyKids*, a children's newspaper. NYC IMC is an open publishing website (nyc.indymedia.org).

VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTORS: Sam Alcott, Bennett Baumer, Nikki Saint Bautista, Eleazar Castillo, Ellen Davidson, Greg Farrell, Mike Finnegan, Seth Fisher, Sophie Forbes, Mary Annaïse Heglar, David Hollenbach, Irina Ivanova, Rob LaQuinta, Christine Larsen, Ashley Marinaccio, Alina Mogilyanskaya, Nicholas Powers, Ann Schneider, John Tarleton, Lucy Valkury, Beth Whitney and Amy Wolf.

community calendar

SUBMIT YOUR EVENTS AT INDYEVENTS@GMAIL.COM.

SAT JUL 21, 28, AUG 4, 11

10am-1:30pm • Free
KIDS JOURNALISM WORKSHOP: *INDYKIDS* PREPARES ITS ELECTION 2012 ISSUE. Open to kids ages 9-13, these journalism workshops will take place in the Lower East Side on four consecutive Saturdays. Kids will work alongside professional journalists to research, write and edit articles about current events, science and social justice. RSVP by emailing nikkisaint@indykids.org. Locations vary.
212-592-0116 • indykids.org

SAT AUG 4

8pm • \$12
FILM: *INVOKING JUSTICE*. In Southern India, family disputes are settled by *Jamaats*, all-male bodies that apply Islamic Shariah law to cases without allowing women to be present, even to defend themselves. In this film a group of women establish a women's *Jamaat* to hold their male counterparts and local police accountable, aiming to reform a profoundly corrupt and discriminatory system. A reception with filmmaker Deepa Dhanraj will be held prior to the screening. Chelsea Clearview Cinemas, 260 W 23rd St
212-777-3456 • womensenews.org

SAT AUG 4

4pm • Free
EVENT: GHOST BIKES PROJECT BBQ. Join the NYC Street Memorial Ghost Bikes Project for a summer barbecue. Ghost Bikes are bicycles painted white and placed as memorials for bicyclists who are killed on the street. We're honoring seven years of the project, and in thanks, want to treat you to beers and BBQ. Greenpoint Reformed Church
136 Milton St, Bklyn
ghostbikes.org

SUN AUG 5

2:30-4:30pm • Free
MEMORIAL: THE BOMBING OF HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI. Join in a memorial of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and an appeal for the abolition of all nuclear weapons. Historian David Watt will provide a historical critique of the bombings and Leila Zand, Middle East program director of Fellowship of Reconciliation, will share a contemporary look at Iran's nuclear threat. Afterward there will be a short procession to Father Demo Square for a silent vigil. St. Joseph's Greenwich Village Church

371 Sixth Ave
212-420-0250 • nypaxchristi.org

FRI AUG 10-MON AUG 13

Various times • Sliding scale
CONFERENCE: POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE 99%. This conference will bring together radical political economists and Occupy activists from around the country to examine the power of the 1% and the ways in which the Occupy movement is addressing these challenges. For more information on times and pricing, visit urpe.org. Epworth Center, High Falls NY
413-577-0806 • urpe.org

MON AUG 13-SUN AUG 19

7:30pm • \$10 Sugg
FILM: *THE CHILEAN BUILDING*. This film details the impact of "Project Home," an initiative that relocated more than 60 children from Chile to Europe. Their parents — militant MIR members — fought the Pinochet dictatorship, and many were never heard from again. The Maysles Cinema, 343 Lenox Ave
212-582-6050 • mayslesinstitute.org

MON SEPT 3

11am • Free
STREET LIFE: WEST INDIAN PARADE AND CARNIVAL. Catch all the color and excitement as Brooklynites gather to celebrate West Indian culture. Everyone's invited to take part in the spectacle of thousands of marchers in colorful costumes jumping down the parade route to the sounds of reggae and calypso. Eastern Pkwy, Bklyn
wiadcacarnival.org

SAT SEPT 8

10am • Free
MARCH: LABOR DAY PARADE. Join the city's public- and private-sector labor unions to show solidarity and strength. Family-friendly events planned throughout the day. Fifth Ave & 44th St
212-604-9552 • nyccllc.org

SAT SEPT 15-SUN SEPT 16

10am-6:30pm • Free
TRAINING: INTERPRETING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE. Are you a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or gender-non-conforming immigrant of color who's fluent in English and another language? This program includes two all-day trainings focused on sharpening interpretation skills for activists to promote social justice in their communities. Audre Lorde Project, 147 W 24th St
718-596-0342 • alp.org

AUG-SEPT

UPCOMING EVENTS

THU, AUG 9 • 7:30pm

BLACK AUGUST SPECIAL: POSTRACIALISM, POSTBLACKNESS & POSTMODERN UNCLE TOMS?

Join philosopher/social critic A. Shahid Stover, singer/media activist Iyanna Jones and radical intellectual/community organizer Kazembe Balagun for what promises to be a lively and relevant dialogue. Co-sponsored by Brotherwise Dispatch Journal.

Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

FRI, AUG 17-SAT, AUG 18 • 8pm-11pm

EVENT: THE DISSIDENT ARTS FESTIVAL 2012.

This year's festival will feature a wide array of artists of conscience ranging from radical jazz musicians to protest singers to experimental artists and everything in between. Performances will take place at Frost Theatre of the Arts in Williamsburg, BK (Aug. 17) and the Brecht Forum (Aug 18).

Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

WED, SEPT 12 • 7:30pm

TALES OF THE 1% FILM SERIES: THE MERCHANT OF FOUR SEASONS.

The Merchant of Four Seasons tells the story of Hans, a fruit peddler, whose choice of career upsets his bourgeois family. Introduction by Charity Scribner.

Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

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451 West Street
(btwn Bank and Bethune)

Please
register online:
brechtforum.org
212-242-4201

MON SEPT 17

MOVING PICKET: OCCUPY WALL STREET ONE YEAR ON. Sept. 17 is the one-year anniversary of the Occupy Wall Street movement. A People's Picket on Wall Street is planned in New York City, as well as other actions nationwide. Stay tuned for details. occupywallst.org

AUG- SEPT, ONGOING

10am-6pm • \$10 Sugg
EXHIBITION: *ACTIVIST NEW YORK*. Explore the drama of social activism in New York City from the 17th century through the present day. Using artifacts, photographs and audio and visual presentations, as well as interactive components that seek to

tell the entire story of activism in the five boroughs, *Activist New York* presents the passions and conflicts that underlie the City's history of agitation. Museum of the City of New York
1220 Fifth Ave
212-534-1672 • mcny.org

SIGN UP TO RECEIVE OUR WEEKLY CALENDAR VIA EMAIL AT INDYPENDENT.ORG.



AND THEN THERE WERE THREE: Congratulations to longtime *Independent* volunteers Amy Wolf and Bennett Baumer! They are now the proud parents of Zev Ben Wolf Baumer. He was born July 7 at 8 lbs., 20.9 inches.



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Why Climate Change Is Everywhere But in the News

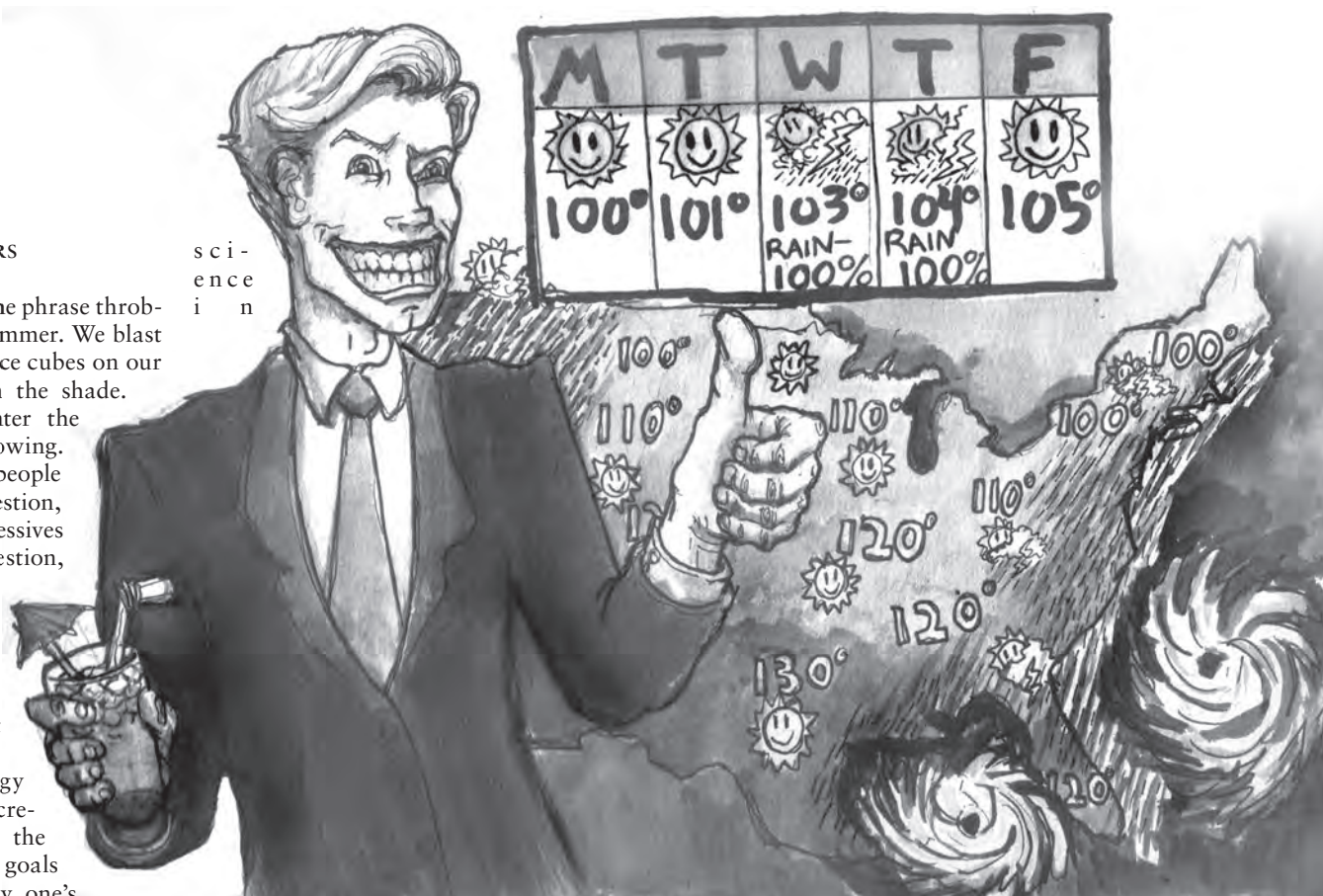
BY INDYPENDENT EDITORS

It's fucking hot — that's the phrase throbbing in our heads this summer. We blast the air-conditioner; rub ice cubes on our necks and fan ourselves in the shade. And after a snowless winter the city's fatigue with heat is growing. As the mercury shoots up, people are forced to ask the question, "why?" It's our job as progressives not just to answer that question, "yes of course, the planet is slowly boiling." But to ask why, in the face of international scientific consensus, does anyone have to ask that question in the first place?

The answer is — ideology and dissociation. The first creates the latter. Ideology is the worldview that sets one's goals and actions. Determined by one's class interest, it becomes a narrative filter that lets some part of reality through but keeps another part out. Example one: a 2012 survey by Forecast the Facts showed that nearly half of TV forecasters don't believe in climate change. Here's the picture — well-dressed, well-paid corporate weather men and women, watching satellite maps on computer screens in air-conditioned offices, tell us that the increasingly weird and dangerous weather is just nature temporarily off its meds and going bipolar.

Why the nonsense? The first reason is social networks. TV forecasters work at corporate media outfits funded by corporate ads and after work, they drink and mingle with the corporate elite. The daily work environment is a total atmosphere of capitalist "get some." Second is professional jealousy. TV forecasters don't have doctorates, just master's degrees and most often not even in science-related fields. And yet, our teeth-whitened teleprompter readers are divas of

sci-
ence
i n



their small soundstage worlds. In turn, the institutions they work for shape their consciousness to protect the corporate status quo, which determines how they read the weather. And that, friends, is the classic definition of ideology.

On the other hand, climate scientists, who often work at universities or nonprofit foundations don't have the profit-motive to warp

that means they don't have the mass audiences of TV forecasters.

So here is the social contradiction. The climate scientists who work in public institutions have the least access to the public. While TV forecasters, who work in for-profit, private businesses have the most access to the public. And that is ideology as social reproduction.

The people who know the most about climate change are the one we hear from the least.

their work. Instead, they trudge far from the cameras to the poles of the earth to test ice and measure carbon levels. They compile the facts. They write reports pointing to a warming, out of control atmosphere. But they are awkward in front of the camera. They don't have the money or connections from the late night corporate mingling. And

What is the consequence of all this? Dissociation — it's a psychological term to describe a state of being in which one is detached from physical or emotional reality. Now, when Americans see forests on fire or dying crops, they're completely disconnected from the true urgency of these events. Instead, they simply fall back on the

explanation that corporate ideology offers time and again: "Hey, that's weird."

Even worse, this dissociation leaves people not just without a reason but also without a way forward. Can we stop the severe weather? What do we do? In the absence of an answer, people will go with individual comfort strategies — blasting the air-conditioning, or jumping in the pool or sitting in the shade. But as New York gets closer to becoming *Soylent Green*, individual survival strategies won't be enough.

And that means we are the "Tipping Point" generation. We don't experience climate change

as the "New Normal" because we have the experience of the decades before to measure reality against corporate ideology. And it's telling that after decades of dissociation, American trust in media is at a low, a 2011 Gallup poll showed 55 percent did not trust the news media while in April 2012 a poll by Knowledge Networks showed that 69 percent believe global warming is causing the wild weather.

Occupy Wall Street was the slap to the face of the plutocracy that has made it possible to talk about economic inequality and be heard proving once again that how we frame problems shapes how we see the solutions. To get the Green Deal and the post-carbon future we need, we have to use every means at our disposal to force a similarly radical and honest conversation about climate change. This is the essential first step.

SUMMER BREAK!

THE INDYPENDENT WILL BE ON VACATION IN AUGUST. WHEN WE RETURN IN SEPTEMBER, WE WILL BE CELEBRATING OUR 12TH ANNIVERSARY. LOOK FOR MORE NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS ABOUT OUR ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS AT INDYPENDENT.ORG.

Sunset Park Tenants Launch Rent Strike

By Laura Gottesdiener

On the front stoop of a four-story brownstone in Brooklyn, three women sat and strategized.

"We should have broken down the door yesterday," Sara Lopez lamented. "The day they help us," she said, waving toward an official from the Department of Housing Preservation and Development standing on the street, "will be the day a dog dances outside on one leg."

Francisca Ixtilico, a short woman who had been an organizer in Mexico, nodded. Breaking down the door had been her idea. She always had the group's most radical ideas, which she usually introduced with the phrase "What we did in Mexico was..." Sue Trelles, the most poised and stylish of the trio, held her tongue; she wasn't the door-breaking type, but she was willing to fight for her right to live with dignity.

The problem was that the building's landlord, Orazio Petito, and his superintendent kept the basement door locked tighter than Fort Knox, preventing city inspectors from cleaning out the rotting garbage or fixing the overtaxed fuse box that sparked and shorted, threatening to set the whole building on fire. Of course, the door was really just one barrier in a thousand that the women had been battling all their lives: slumlords content to let them burn or freeze to death; employers who coerced and threatened them after accidents or mistreatment; police who never seemed to come when help was needed on their block; and the vague but ever-present forces of racism, sexism, language barriers, and threats of deportation. But when confronted with the laundry list of oppression that low-income immigrant women face in Brooklyn, the best thing to do, Lopez and her neighbors argue, is to start with the problem most likely to burst into flames.

That's why, for over a year, Lopez, Trelles and Ixtilico have been knocking on doors, holding meetings and organizing a multi-building rent strike at 545, 553, and 557 46th Street in Sunset Park that is now drawing media attention. But as photos of tangled wiring and firecracker fuses appear on the nightly news, the real story is not the crumbling building or the landlord's abuses, but the neighborhood activists who have turned this injustice into a powerful example of community-building and community-led organizing.

The rent strike started two years ago. Sara Lopez woke up early one morning. No one

sleeps much in these three buildings — in the winter there's no heat, in the summer there's no electricity, and all year there are rats and cockroaches scurrying in the walls — but that morning Lopez had slept even worse than usual, and she was angry.

"I thought and thought and decided that I needed to do something," she said. "So I knocked on 51 doors because I got mad at so much injustice."

She enlisted Trelles to help, and at each door they spread a clear message: Stop paying rent. They didn't make any political arguments about private property or capitalism or self-governance. Instead, Lopez — a

neighborhood's residents live below the poverty line, and the majority speak either Spanish or Mandarin as a first language. But in a society where immigrant women who speak little English are often bullied, intimidated or ignored, these women are loud, assertive and highly public about their right to live with dignity. And they are teaching others to push back as well.

notices and threatening to call immigration. Ixtilico wasn't intimidated. She recognized Sara's ideas from her Catholic organizing group in Mexico, which used strikes and direct action to win house repairs, stop evictions and pressure local government to fund sports fields and other public projects. She placed a small red sign in her window for all the world to see: "Rent Strike." Other tenants soon followed suit.

The campaign's bold words and actions have inspired community members not only to stand up for their rights as tenants, but also to reconsider social and political marginalization itself. About 80 percent of the

trio seem to appreciate them, love them and humor them — but, like many of the rent strikes in New York City's history, this is a women's show.

As the strike spread to include the majority of residents in all three buildings, the neighborhood began taking notice. Cars and walkers slowed to read the signs and discuss the strike, the news coverage and their own decrepit buildings.

"I've lived here for 12 years, and I've never seen something take off like this," said Priscilla Grim, who lives a few blocks away from the buildings and works with the social media team of OccupyWallSt.org. Grim

and other neighbors from Occupy Sunset Park and writers from the Occupy-affiliated Spanish newspaper *Indig-Nación* joined the strikers three weeks ago, bringing new organizing tools and media attention while learning from the women's low-tech, word-of-mouth campaign. Soon, the residents and Occupy Sunset Park began gathering for bilingual meetings, sharing resources and planning press conferences and marches and even carried out a brief occupation of assemblyman Felix Ortiz's district office. Housing activists from Take Back the Land and the New York City squatters' movement joined in, pushing the conversation toward transformative visions of community control of the buildings.

The striking women already saw and believed in such visions, even if they didn't have words for them quite yet. One afternoon, as the women waited to see if anyone from the rotating cast of building inspectors, health workers, fire marshals, police officers, elected officials or news cameramen would be willing or able to open the basement door, a man in a suit and a shiny black SUV drove up and started taking photos of the buildings. He claimed to be a prospective landlord checking out a possible investment.

"He's probably a detective," Lopez said, shielding her face from the camera's lens.

"Besides, we don't want any more landlords," said Ixtilico.

Laura Gottesdiener is a freelance writer in New York City. She is the author of A Dream Foreclosed: The Great Eviction and the Fight to Live in America, forthcoming from Zuccotti Park Press.

This is adapted from an article that originally appeared at wagingnonviolence.org.



HOUSING RIGHTS: Tenant leader Sara Lopez speaks at a July 5 press conference organized with support from Occupy Sunset Park.

retired public employee who says she still has faith in the power and intentions of the local government — was espousing a radicalism born from necessity and experience. She knew that tenants could run the buildings better than Petito, whom she called *un payaso*, which means "clown" in Spanish but sounds far more poisonous hissed in her Honduran accent. In the winter of 1982, after a former landlord simply abandoned the buildings without heat, Lopez brought the buildings' families together to govern themselves — collecting money to pay the bills and replace the boiler and forming teams to clean the hallways, put the trash out and make repairs.

"We were the owners for six months," she remembered.

The negligent landlords returned, however. Now, Lopez has once again brought the tenants together, hosting community meetings that grew until the whole first-floor hallway was packed. Many of the residents were afraid; a number of the tenants lacked U.S. residency papers, and once the strike began Petito was quick to knock on those families' doors first, waving forged eviction

Immigrant Dragnet

FEDS BRING CONTROVERSIAL PROGRAM TO NYC AREA

BY RENÉE FELTZ

The controversial immigration enforcement program known as Secure Communities quietly went into effect in New York City this May after a similar low-key start in New Jersey. Amy Gottlieb of the American Friends Service Committee in Newark says she got the news in a phone call from Univision. “They said, ‘Amy did you know its going into effect tomorrow?’ I had no idea!”

The expansion followed earlier refusals by Governors Chris Christie of New Jersey and Andrew Cuomo of New York to join the program, which shares fingerprints gathered by local law enforcement with federal agents at Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The agency calls Secure Communities its “single most valuable tool” in finding and deporting dangerous criminals. But when Cuomo attempted to withdraw from the program last June, he argued it had failed to meet its stated goal of targeting such felons as most undocumented immigrants who are detained and deported under Secure Communities have a minor criminal record or none at all.

In fact, since Secure Communities’ February 22, 2012 start date in New Jersey, ICE data shows the program found matches for 2,669 immigrants eligible for deportation. This has led to the deportation of 111 people. Just 19 of them had been convicted of “Level 1” offenses like murder, rape and the sexual abuse of children.

Meanwhile in New York state, at least 994 immigrants out of 13,901 identified have been deported since Secure Communities went into effect in a handful of counties in early 2011 and then grew to include New York City and the rest of the state on May 15, 2012. Since then ICE found at least 2,100 matches in New York City, but its data is incomplete on whether any of those individuals were “removed and returned.”

AGGRESSIVE POLICING

Advocates working in the city’s five boroughs say anecdotal evidence already shows ICE is asking officers at NYPD’s local precincts to place “detainers” on immigrants they arrest. Public defenders report seeing people arrive for arraignment in criminal courts with “ICE holds” placed on them before they see a judge. They say detainers can affect whether a judge decides to grant bail or send a person to pre-trial diversionary programs such as drug treatment.

Even NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly has said of Secure Communities, “We prefer that they not do that here.” Advocates say the program prompts fear among immigrants who would otherwise approach police for help or to report a crime, since they too could find themselves fingerprinted in the process and brought to ICE’s attention. The impact is even greater in communities where the NYPD is already widely distrusted.

In the heavily immigrant borough of Queens, residents have long been subject to arrest by overzealous police officers for failing to have proper identification. Now, they

report increased surveillance via mobile police precincts set up at night in Jackson Heights and Corona. Advocates say police have also stepped up their patrols in parks near Elmhurst Hospital where day laborers often sleep overnight to avoid paying for housing so they can save money to send home to their families.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

New Immigrant Community Empowerment (NICE), a Jackson Heights-based immigrant support group that works with newly arrived low-wage undocumented workers, conducts role-playing trainings with its members to practice how to interact with police. Many members have consular ID cards which officers think are fake, so the group also issues its own ID cards.

“When an officer sees they have a NICE ID they’ll stop harassing that person and let them go,” says Valaria Treves, NICE’s executive director. “They’re looking for the most vulnerable individual they can find. If they see they’re tied to a community organization they move on to the next person.”

In Flushing, home to the city’s largest Asian immigrant community, Steve Choi, head of the Minkwon Center, says there has never been strong communication with police and “this extra layer of Secure Communities really complicates matters.”

A majority of Asians living in New York are foreign born, and as many as 20 percent are undocumented. Choi says when officers respond to a dispute involving an English speaker and a Korean or Mandarin speaker, they often take both sides down to the precinct to sort things out. Anyone whose fingerprints are entered into the system can be tracked by ICE.

Further out in Suffolk County, many residents are living in fear, “now that a minor traffic stop can turn into a nightmare,” says Luis Valenzuela, executive director of the Long Island Immigrant Alliance. As in Queens, many families are “mixed status,” with children or a spouse who is a citizen or a legal resident, while one or both parents are undocumented.

All of this comes after President Barack Obama’s announcement in June of a new federal policy to stop deporting some 800,000 young immigrants and allow them to apply for work permits. The move came

amid growing criticism that during Obama’s first three years in office, Secure Communities aided the deportation of more than 1.1 million people — nearly double the rate under President George W. Bush.

“These policies seem to be in stark contrast when you look at the impact on immigrant communities,” says Jackie Esposito of the New York Immigration Coalition. “The DREAM policy is not going to have a meaningful impact if parents and other

Communities’ reach. Earlier this month, the Washington, D.C. City Council approved a measure that only allows detainers to be placed on immigrants convicted of serious crimes. It also limits police to holding immigrants on whom a detainer is placed for 24 hours, instead of the usual 48 hours, and specifies that ICE pay the local costs of jailing the immigrant.

New York City Council’s Christine Quinn has already said that she and her colleagues

would be “drafting legislation to establish parameters on the NYPD’s interaction with ICE.” It is a promise advocates are watching closely. “Even though the federal government has mandated the fingerprint sharing to occur, that is a civil request,” says Treves of NICE. “I think New York’s City Council has the power to pass legislation to mandate that NYPD will not honor detainers from ICE.”

But for now, the Secure Communities dragnet has been cast wide in the city of immigrants.

Renée Feltz was a 2010 Soros Justice Media Fellow and co-editor of DeportationNation.org. She currently works as a producer at Democracy Now.



IMMIGRANT ACTION: Since Secure Communities went into effect in New York City, immigrant rights groups throughout Queens, such as New Immigrant Community Empowerment (NICE), have been training members how to interact with police.

family members continue to get deported at the same time.”

LIMITING ICE’S REACH

Across the country, local jurisdictions are finding their own ways to restrict Secure

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

These are some of the immigrant rights groups in the New York City area working to stop Secure Communities, while also preparing community members for its impact.

NEW YORK IMMIGRATION COALITION

137-139 W. 25th St., 12th Fl., Manhattan
(212) 627-2227 • TheNYIC.org

AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE (NEWARK)

IMMIGRANT RIGHTS PROGRAM
89 Market St., 6th Fl., Newark, NJ
(973) 643-1924 • AFSC.org

NEW IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT (NICE)

37-41 77th St., 2nd Fl., Jackson Heights
(718) 205-8796 • NYNICE.org

MINKWON CENTER

136-19 41st Ave. (Btwn Main St. & Union St.), 3rd Fl., Flushing, Queens
(718) 460-5600 • Minkwon.org

LONG ISLAND IMMIGRANT ALLIANCE

143 Schlegel Blvd., Amityville, N.Y.
(631) 789-0720 • LongIslandImmigrantAlliance.com

Finding a Future

NYC SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM OPENS DOORS FOR YOUTH BUT LACKS FUNDS TO MEET SURGING DEMAND

BY ALINA MOGILYANSKAYA

On July 5, nearly 30,000 New York City youth went off to their first day as participants in the city's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP).

That morning, Jason Ebanks stood in front of a classroom at the Henry Street Settlement, a social services provider based in the Lower East Side. A former SYEP participant who went on to graduate from SUNY-Buffalo, Ebanks, 27, was there to teach this summer's SYEP orientation. In a city where youth and teen unemployment has spiked in recent years, the Settlement's classroom was filled with scores of young people. But it was less busy than at the beginning of the past two summers, when the Settlement had the government funding to offer summer jobs to 1,500 young people, 256 more than this year. And the drop-off was even more marked from 2009, when federal stimulus money allowed the Settlement to offer the program to 3,000 youth.

"I can say that my SYEP experience was surely what sparked the interest that created the drive that pushed me and helps me, to this day, persevere through most things," said Ebanks, who worked as a junior camp counselor in the Bronx in the summer of 2000. "We will never know how many Cornel Wests, Octavia Butlers or Malcolm X's we've missed out on by cutting these budgets."

For many of Ebanks' students, this will be their first real job — an opportunity to work, earn income and learn adult life skills. The program provides youth ages 14–24 with seven weeks of work experience, often as counselors or aides at summer day camps or in government agencies, community centers, cultural institutions or professional offices. Almost 75 percent of SYEP participants are black and Latino youth, who as a group suffer an unemployment rate well above 30 percent.

The program also includes weekly educational sessions on responsibility, time and money management, workplace expectations and exploration of career and educational opportunities. Participants are paid minimum wage, \$7.25 per hour, for both work and classroom time, taking home a salary every two weeks.

"It's really important for minors because it gives them the opportunity to apply for and get jobs that they otherwise couldn't," said Nandrianina Rarivoson, a 20-year-old Union College junior who is interning at a law office through SYEP. She recalls trying to find a retail job at age 16, to no avail. She received her first paid job through SYEP in



ASHLEY MARINACCIO

LIFE LESSONS: Jason Ebanks, 27, helps participants in the summer youth employment program develop adult life skills. He says participating in SYEP as a teenager transformed his life.

2010 when she was hired as a teacher's assistant at the Red Apple Child Development Center. Last summer, she was rehired at Red Apple for a full-time summer staff position as head counselor.

100,000 LEFT OUT

For many, SYEP provides that first crucial opportunity to get a foot in the door of the professional world, but for the roughly 100,000 young people who also applied but were not chosen through the Department of Youth and Community Development's (DYCD) lottery this summer, the outlook is

through SYEP, says that without the program, she wouldn't be employed. "I'd have to wait until I was 17 or 18 to get a job, perhaps at a retail store like other teens," she said. When asked what she'd be doing with her summer if she didn't have the Bellevue position, she replied, "Honestly, nothing."

UNDERFUNDED

Founded in the late 1960s, SYEP is widely praised for giving disadvantaged youth a positive alternative to being out of work and on the street during the summer. With a budget of \$43 million (\$20.6 million of which comes from the city), it is hobbled by a shortage of funding that allowed it to place

less than a fourth of this year's 132,187 applicants. The number of summer jobs offered by the program is expected to decline from 31,628 last year to about 29,000 this year, according to Andre White, director of SYEP. This was caused in part by a recent drop in private funding, on which the program has become more dependent since Mayor Michael Bloomberg cut \$3.3 million from its budget in 2011.

"It's kind of a back-door cut, which is a lot harder to fight and to really galvanize people around," said Kevin Douglas, senior policy analyst at United Neighborhood Houses and the main spokesman of the Campaign for Summer Jobs, a coalition of citywide SYEP providers that advocates for SYEP funding. "They thought they were go-

ing to rely on private dollars, and that's a very risky strategy to budget the future on."

Asked if it would be feasible to provide a job for every SYEP applicant if funds weren't limited, White replied, "We'd definitely put all 131,000 kids to work if we had the money."

Kristina Sepulveda, director of youth employment services at Henry Street Settlement, echoes the sentiment. The Settlement received 7,492 SYEP applications and was able to offer 1,244 spots this summer, although it had thousands more possible jobs available. "We have three times more work-site slots than kids," Sepulveda said. "The demand from employers is there."

"It's a shame that we always have to be having conversations every year about how many slots are we going to lose, how many slots can we bring back," added Melissa Mark-Viverito (D, WFP-East Harlem), a member of the City Council's Committee on Youth Services. "The fact that it's a program that is even on the chopping block to me doesn't make sense because it's a wise investment and the returns are so much more for us as a society."

UNCERTAIN FUTURE

In June, DYCD, which oversees SYEP, released a concept paper that hints at the continued financial pressures the program is facing. Under this draft plan, DYCD estimates providing 23,000 summer jobs next year while reducing all participants' work assignments from seven weeks to six. The hours of 14- and 15-year-olds would be

Mayor Bloomberg is being criticized for cutting programs directed at young people who he says he wants to help.

different.

"They're looking for jobs, or if not, they're in the house all day or trying to find something to do," said Larry White, a 21-year-old SYEP participant, of six of his friends who applied to SYEP this summer but were not selected. While White is working as a leadership mentor with teens at Grand Street Settlement, his friends who are looking for jobs are trying to find a position working in the parks, with youth, or in retail, he says. "They're out every morning, trying to get interviews on the spot, resumé in hand."

Last year, a DYCD survey of youth participants indicated that without SYEP, 77 percent of them would not have had a summer job. Tenzing Andrugtsang, a 15-year-old doing data entry at Bellevue Hospital

capped at 20 per week.

Advocates are concerned that a further scaling back of SYEP would not only shortchange participants in the program

but could also affect younger children and working families across the city. Over half of all SYEP participants work at summer daycare or day camp centers, looking after and leading younger children in educational and recreational activities.

As the number of SYEP participants decreases, so does the number of children that can be served by these centers. "It's kind of like a multiplier effect: the less kids that are in SYEP, the less kids that can actually be served through other programs," said Douglas of the Campaign for Summer Jobs.

Putting SYEP participants on a six-week work schedule will likely force summer daycare and day camp providers to scale down their programs from seven to six weeks as well, putting an additional burden on families who rely on these facilities during the summer.

"What does that mean for working parents?" asked Gregory Rideout, deputy program officer for youth services and workforce development at Henry Street Settlement. "They've got three to four weeks before school starts in which they're going to have to figure out their own childcare."

In an interview, Andre White of SYEP stressed that the concept paper is only a proposal. As *The Independent* went to press, the DYCD was still accepting public comments.

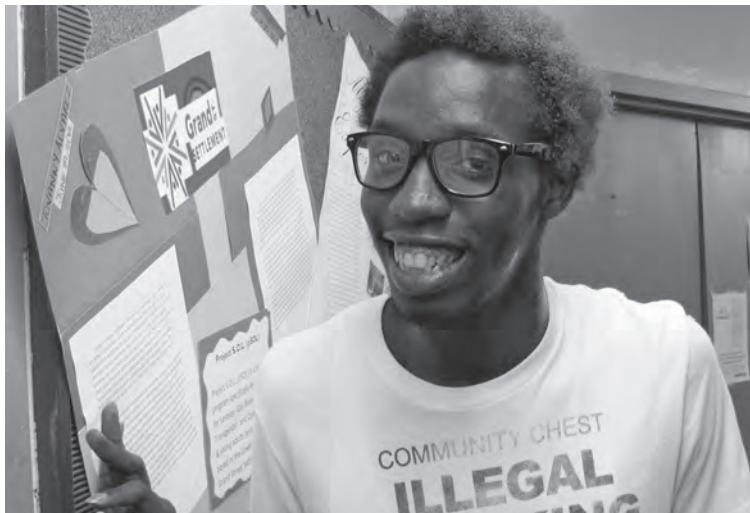
A LARGER PATTERN

JOBS NOT JAILS

New York City's spending on summer jobs for youth is dwarfed by what it spends on a police force that disproportionately targets young people of color:

- # of participants in youth summer jobs program in 2009: 52,255
- # of participants in youth summer jobs program in 2010: 35,725
- # of participants in youth summer jobs program in 2011: 31,628
- # of participants in youth summer jobs program in 2012: 29,000 (est.)
- # of applicants not accepted for 2012 youth summer jobs program in 2012: 103,000 (est.)
- Total spending on NYC youth summer jobs program: \$43 million
- City funds allocated for NYC summer jobs program: \$20.6 million
- FY 2012 budget for the New York Police Department: \$4.55 billion
- FY 2012 overtime spending by the NYPD: \$585 million
- Money spent on policing Occupy Wall Street, (Sept. 2011 to March 2012): \$17 million
- # of stop-and-frisks experienced by black and Latino males ages 14-24 in 2011: 341,581

Sources: Summer Youth Employment Program, New York City Council Public Safety Committee, NYPD, NYCLU



MOTIVATED: Larry White, 21, of Brooklyn, about to enter an SYEP educational session taught by Jason Ebanks at the Henry Street Settlement.

The underfunding of SYEP follows on the heels of a drive this spring by Bloomberg to cut city funding for childcare and after-school programs by \$170 million, a move that was thwarted by the City Council. Cuts



OPPORTUNITY: Nandrianina Rarivoson, 20, of Brooklyn, on her way to a law office where she is interning this summer through SYEP.

in public education spending in recent years have contributed to overcrowded classrooms, while CUNY community colleges have seen funding cuts coupled with rising tuition. According to the New York City

Liberties Union, 42 percent of all stop-and-frisks performed in 2011 targeted black and Latino youth ages 14-24, though they make up only 5 percent of the city's population.

At a July 5 press conference held at the Queens Botanical Garden to mark the first day of SYEP, Bloomberg seized on the opportunity afforded by media presence to rail against critics of the NYPD's policing practices, in particular, stop-and-frisk.

"Right here in New York City, we have interest groups, politicians and now judges that are hell-bent on reversing the progress that we've made," Bloomberg said. "We have an aggressive effort by some here to

take us backwards in time. I can just tell you, we are not going to let that happen."

Ironically, Bloomberg made headlines last summer when he announced he was teaming up with fellow billionaire George Soros to donate \$60 million in seed money toward a three-year, \$127.5 million city program known as the Young Men's Initiative. YMI's stated goal is "to tackle the broad disparities slowing

the advancement of black and Latino young men." As envisioned, YMI would bring together under one umbrella a number of city initiatives, from overhauling the city's Department of Probation to providing mentoring and literacy services to "disconnected" youth. One thing it doesn't envision is directing any funds toward creating actual jobs for young people.

For Councilwoman Mark-Viverito, the mayor's policies toward the city's disadvantaged youth continue to be frustrating and contradictory.

"It just doesn't seem to connect the dots," said Mark-Viverito of Bloomberg's parallel launch of YMI and insistence on stop-and-frisk, both programs targeting young black and Latino men, albeit in very different ways. "And then when you couple that with cutting programs that are directed at young people, SYEP, after-school programs, the childcare slots, again, it doesn't really seem to connect with what he is saying."

"It's like everything is being done in a vacuum, and one thing detracts from another."

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JIM CROW AMERICA

WHY OUR SOCIETY'S RACIAL CASTE SYSTEM STILL EXISTS

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

Imagine living in Jim Crow America. You are born to a single mother who is one of the ten million black people in poverty. On the television, in casual talk or music you learn by age five that black equals negative and white, positive. Subconsciously you see your skin as a weight, a burden. You go to an urban school with a daily gauntlet of metal detectors, bag searches and pat downs. You hear stories of family relatives jailed for drugs, who you never met just being released. As you grow up, you talk on the street corner but police stop and frisk you all the time. The feeling of their hands on your body linger long after they've left. You never feel safe. Your idols are people who look like you in videos rapping on how to kill, steal, and buy. You don't talk like the wealthy. You know where to buy drugs.

You graduate but there are no jobs. You hang out, smoke and drink. Everything is falling apart. You try to make a drug deal, quick cash you think, nothing serious but you're sweating. And you get busted, cop a plea and now have a record. You get busted again and again until you are living inside a cell. The walls squeeze your soul and you want to scream but instead you sleep a lot and fight, years later you get out. No one will hire you. No one can let you stay at their apartment, it's against the rules. You beg on the train sometimes, but run in shame when you bump into a relative.

One day you're walking with your child, who is having trouble at school. Teachers say they're throwing tantrums in class and is going to be labeled retarded. Later, you are going to a friend's building and see your child not in school but on the corner, it's the same corner you stood on years ago, and a strange roaring sound fills your head. You begin yelling — you want your child to run from the corner, run from this life, run from everything you've become.

ANTIQUATED

Jim Crow — the name calls up antiquated imagery of “whites only” signs, “colored” waiting rooms and, at worst, a grinning white mob gloating over the charred body of a Black man. These images disgust and horrify us, but it also comforts us to view them as evidence of a past that has receded in the rearview mirror of history. Ahead of us, the rising sun logo of the Obama campaign welcomes us to a post-racial America.

“We’re sort of in that la-la land of believing we’re in this post-racial place. It’s not just a modern phenomenon,” anti-racism scholar Tim Wise said in a 2009 interview with the Open Society Institute. “White folks, going back 40 to 50 years, did not, even in the early ‘60s, think that racism was really a big deal worth focusing very much attention on. A small minority did realize that, but the vast majority said at that time that people of color had equal opportunity with white folks.”

“Rearview racism” describes the view that bigotry is visible only as a relic of the past and not as a real, lived and present reality. This view assumes that we live in an equal nation in which radical change is not needed. It amplifies the internalized racism

of the oppressed, as seen, for example, in a 2007 Pew Research Center survey in which middle-class Blacks said there was a “widening” gulf of values between themselves and poor Blacks.

Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* shatters the "rearview mirror" by forcing readers to see how, with new words and methods, our nation reproduces racial caste. The book focuses on the criminal justice system — a central conduit that transforms citizens into domestic aliens. In the name of the war on drugs, she writes, police patrol, stop, frisk and arrest poor people in ghettos. This practice has left 80 percent of Black men in most major cities with criminal records. Once released from incarceration, she explains, they enter a "hidden underworld of legalized discrimination" where ex-felons can't vote, can't get jobs, can't find housing and can't escape the stigma of having a record.

People of color of every class experienced some degree of discrimination, but the Black poor are the true target of the new Jim Crow. The Black poor, once a part of a cross-class alliance with the Black middle- and upper classes, were abandoned after the legal victories of the civil rights movement. Left behind in the coffin of the inner cities, poor Black families have been living the

Family members come back from prison traumatized and unable to find jobs. Sickness kills relatives who don't have healthcare, riddling the family with holes of despair.

continuous nightmare of Jim Crow since the end of the Reconstruction era.

THE OLD JIM CROW

When the smoke of civil war cleared in 1865, African-Americans staggered onto the roads and searched for those who had been sold into slavery. Names were carried by memory for miles across the war-blasted land in hopes of finding lost kin. Sometimes they were dead. But even when newly emancipated people found their parents or children alive, their joyful embraces were mixed with pain as their hands felt scars on their loved ones' backs.

In her book *Sugar of the Crop: My Journey to Find the Children of Slaves*, author Sana Butler interviewed the last, dying offspring of slaves. She asked them what happened in the years after the Civil War. An elderly woman named Jenny told her, "Our parents no longer lived for themselves. Their mindset was — I no longer have a life. I am living for the future." Jenny's parents didn't tell her the details of slavery because "they didn't want me to be angry. They wanted me to come up with my own reality."

Slowly, in the wake of war, life restarted. Five million Black people had left slavery and become citizens. They were dirt poor. They were trapped in the South. In order to provide for them, the Radical Republicans in Congress created the Federal Freedmen's Bureau, which oversaw the labor

contracts of former slaves, opened schools and distributed food and medicine. In 1869, President Ulysses S. Grant vowed to protect Black people's right to vote; two years later, Black politicians were elected to state offices across the South.

And then the terror began. White militias shot Black voters, stuffed ballot boxes and paraded in the streets. They called themselves the Ku Klux Klan, the White League and the Red Shirts — groups whose names burned fear into the minds of Black people. In the wake of the elections of 1876, conservative President Rutherford B. Hayes withdrew federal soldiers from Southern capitals and abandoned Blacks to the rage of their former owners.

New laws came down like an iron curtain between Black people and freedom. Poll taxes and literacy tests were followed by the physical separation of public space. Life shrank inside paranoia. If whites were on the sidewalk, you jumped off. When whites talked, you lowered your head and voice until your whole being fit into the shuffling, smiling caricature of Jim Crow: a buffoon-like “coon” image that let whites imagine Blacks as nonthreatening servants. If Blacks pushed for rights, whites projected more threatening imagery onto them, such as the rapist Black male “brute” or lascivious “Jezebel.” And then hung, raped or burned Black people alive.

Segregation deepened into a chasm. In 1890, Louisiana politicians passed the Separate Car Act dividing trains into white and “colored.” When it was challenged, the Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that “separate but equal” was legal. Racists were free to force Black children into separate schools and to grow up in separate neighborhoods and work in separate jobs. Black citizens could be arrested, tried and sentenced in all-white courts. It was a cultural cycle that, like a boa constrictor, choked those trapped inside — and it continues today.

CHILDHOOD LESSONS

“Show me the smart child,” the tester said to a Black girl. They were in a classroom looking at a cartoon series of identical girls whose skin went from white to brown. The Black girl pointed to the image of the white girl. When asked why, she said, “Because she’s white.” The tester asked, “Show me the dumb child.” Hesitating, the Black girl pointed to an image of the Black girl.

On April 2, CNN aired an Anderson Cooper 360 series that investigated the effect of racism on children. It recreated the "Doll Tests," made famous by Kenneth Clark in 1940, in which he gave two identical dolls, one brown, the other white, to Black children, then asked which was prettiest. They overwhelmingly chose the white doll.

Racism pours into the minds of children

and warps their self-image. Cooper described it as a “deluge” of messages from the surrounding adult culture. In the test, when asked which skin color looked worst, 70 percent of older Black children and 61 percent of the youngest picked the darkest shade.

FAMILY LIFE

Out of 40 million African-Americans, 10 million live in suffocating poverty — and they are being joined by the new poor. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2008 the poverty rate was around 13 percent — nearly 40 million people. Three years after the 2008 Wall Street crash, in 2011, the rate had swelled by nearly three million. These Americans once lived in the middle class but lost their jobs, lost their homes and wept in shock as their furniture was thrown on their front lawns.

Poverty recreates poverty. Looking at Jim Crow America and at the Black poor, we can see the effect of generational scarcity. Families are broken by the stress of hopelessness—they work too hard for too long, earn too little and become estranged or get caught in a downward spiral of drugs and jail. The Children's Defense Fund, in a 2011 report entitled *Portrait of Inequality: Black Children in America*, found that 40 percent of Black children live in poverty, and that half of Black children live only with their mother. Black children are seven times more likely to have at least one parent (usually the father) in prison.

FAILING SCHOOLS

The stress of poverty follows children into the schools. *Portrait of Inequality* notes that “at nine months Black babies score lower on measures of cognitive development than white babies.” At 24 months, the gap triples. By age four, Black children are on a slippery slope of worsening test scores.

The chaotic life of poverty and its toll on relationships often means that parents fight and split up. Family members come back from prison traumatized and unable to find jobs. Sickness kills relatives who don't have healthcare, riddling the family with holes of despair. The book *Black Children: Social, Educational and Parental Environments*, edited by Harriet Pipes McAdoo, explores children's coping mechanisms: when a father loses a job or a mother is sick, children alternate between self-isolation and "acting out" to demand love. In school this behavior can lead to punishment or interfere with learning. *Portrait of Inequality* found that a black child is "one and a half times more likely than a white child to be placed in a class for students with emotional disturbances" and twice as likely to be labeled mentally retarded.

Black youth are more likely to be suspended and expelled, forcing them to slip further backward. Nearly forty percent of Black children are trapped in “drop out factories.” Our education system works like a filter that lets a few Black students into college — Black males ages 18 and up comprise only 5 percent of the U.S. college educated population, but nearly 40 percent of the prison population. And for

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JIM CROW

Continued from page 8

the few who graduate from college, ready to perform the entry-level skilled work that used to be the ladder to the middle class, there is little work: such jobs account for 95 percent of the jobs destroyed by the 2008 Wall Street crash.

'THE NEW N-WORD'

The prisons are filled with Black high school dropouts. In the academic journal *Daedalus*, sociologists Bruce Western and Betty Pettit noted that in 1980, roughly 10 percent of Black high school dropouts were in jail. Twenty-eight years later, 37 percent were imprisoned. If the trends hold, 68 percent of Black dropouts born from 1975 to 1979 will end up in jail.

And as Michelle Alexander points out in *The New Jim Crow*, whites and Blacks do drugs at roughly the same amount, but Blacks are arrested at much higher rates. She writes, "The U.S. penal population exploded from around 300,000 to more than 2 million, with drug convictions accounting for the majority." Of the 2.1 million men in prison, 42 percent are Black: nearly 900,000 men. Even when released, these men are barred from full participation in society.

One Black pastor quoted by Alexander said: "Felony is the new N-word. They don't have to call you a nigger anymore. They just say you're a felon. In every ghetto you see alarming numbers of young men with felony convictions. Once you have that felony stamp, your hope for employment, for any kind of integration into society, it begins to fade out. Today's lynching is a felony charge."

VOTER SUPPRESSION

Felons can't vote. And when voter suppression laws pass, neither can the poor. In a repeat of the poll tax, literacy tests and voter intimidation of the old Jim Crow era, today the right to vote is being re-segregated. In Alabama, Kansas, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Florida and Wisconsin, Republican governors and lawmakers are enacting strict new voting laws. These range from purging voter rolls of "illegals" to demanding that voters show pho-

to IDs, which poor people, who move often and don't have money to get new IDs, often don't have.

Ben Jealous, the president of the NAACP, recently said on *Democracy Now!*, "More states have passed more laws pushing more citizens in our country out of the ballot box in the past 12 months than in — you know, than since the rise of Jim Crow. You have to go back to the 1890s to find a year when we passed more laws pushing more voters out of the ballot box than we have seen in the past 12 months, five million people pushed out, disproportionately Black and brown."

CYCLE OF LIFE

"I did thirteen years in prison," Tony, my neighbor in Bed-Stuy, said as we sat on the stoop. "Even now it's hard to get work." We watched young men light a joint, eyeing the street for cops. Nearby, a young girl with pigtails chased a boy who was laughing so hard he hiccupped. I looked at them and wondered how long it would be before they dropped out of school and began smoking and fighting on the block. How long until their first arrests?

Here is the cycle of life in Third World New York: Black and Latino kids go to broken public schools from which nearly half don't graduate, they enter a jobless economy, and they become racially profiled teens who are stopped and frisked and jailed, who return home unable to find work, housing or support, who become absent fathers or beleaguered mothers, who end up exhausted and old, helplessly watching from the stoop as their children go to the same broken schools to begin the cycle all over again.

And the rage twisting inside me is that they are the most vulnerable among us. They don't have savings to pay lawyers or fines; they don't have status to protect them or a social movement to trumpet their cause. They are the descendants of American slaves, and their lives have been cannon fodder for our schools and prisons. They and their families have lived through centuries of a racial nightmare that no one, not even our first Black president, wants to name.

Small towns in America love to post welcome signs. I wanted to walk to the end of my block and nail into the sidewalk one that reads: "Welcome to Jim Crow America."

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When Domestic Violence Hits Close to Home

By JOHN TARLETON

I was home alone in the kitchen of my ground-level brownstone apartment on the night of the Fourth of July when I heard a woman’s screams amid the popping of fireworks set off by neighborhood kids.

“Help! Help! A man is trying to kill me!” I continued typing on my laptop for about 30 seconds, not fully registering what I was hearing. The cries for help continued. Living in a big city can diffuse our sense of personal responsibility and in a flash I thought of Kitty Genovese, the Queens woman whose 1964 stabbing death became a symbol of urban malaise when it was later reported that 37 of her neighbors had ignored her pleas for help over the course of more than half an hour.

I stepped out my backdoor to try and locate where the screams were coming from. It was a neighbor who lives on the third floor of our building in West Harlem. She had barricaded herself in her bedroom following a violent altercation with her boyfriend. She urged me to call the police. With her boyfriend looming outside her door and her cell phone in another part of her apartment, she couldn’t make the call herself.

CALLING THE POLICE

I took a deep breath. My first impulse is to distrust the police. Too often the cops use their power callously and without regard for the people they are supposed to “serve and protect.” But I did as she asked and called 911. The NYPD, however, was nowhere to be seen. Venturing out of my apartment, I found her boyfriend standing impassively on the front stoop of the building. He took out his cell phone and showed me that he had also placed a 911 call. He said that his girlfriend was “troubled” and that he was concerned about her well-being after she had attacked him and torn up the apartment in the process. I continued upstairs to check on my neighbor. The door to her apartment was slightly ajar. After I announced myself and repeatedly knocked on the door, a woman’s

face peeked out at me. She blinked and a single tear appeared. A dark bluish-black mark marred the left side of her face just below the eye. (Her mascara

had run, she later told me.) I ascertained that she was not seriously hurt. When I mentioned that her boyfriend was downstairs, she became agitated. She urged me to tell him to

leave. When I conveyed her message, the boyfriend insisted he would stay until the police came because he wanted to make sure she was OK. I urged him to go home and call it a night. He wouldn’t hear of it.

DISASTER ZONE

I went back upstairs. This time, the woman allowed me into her apartment. I stepped across piles of magazines that were lying on the floor near the front door. Her bedroom looked as if a tornado had blown through — a shelving unit was toppled and books and personal effects were scattered on the ground. The kitchen floor was also a mess with items that had fallen from another shelf. “I would never do this to my own home,” she said.

I asked why her boyfriend called 911 and stayed on the scene. She explained that he was in a custody battle with another woman who was the mother of his small child. After trashing the apartment, the boyfriend had calmed down and realized he needed to stick around and discredit her version of events. After what had just happened, she could testify against him in his child custody case. Noting that her boyfriend is a military veteran, the woman worried aloud that the police would take his side.

The woman was just finishing telling me her story when we heard the heavy footsteps of police officers coming up the wooden staircase. The four officers (three male, one female) were calm and professional. They asked me to stand off to the side. After listening to the woman and her boyfriend explain what had happened and asking follow-up questions of both parties, the police took the boyfriend to jail.

Afterwards, I spoke with the woman in the front foyer of our building. I asked if she would take her boyfriend back. She shook her head and said, “no.” They were done. She appeared both stunned by what had transpired and relieved to have survived the ordeal.

“I’m so embarrassed,” she said. “I’m college-educated and have had good professional jobs. I never thought something like this could happen to me.”



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Getting Beneath the Tri-Corner Hat

The Rise of the Tea Party
By ANTHONY DIMAGGIO
MONTHLY REVIEW PRESS, 2011

At the beginning of Occupy Wall Street, many pundits grasping for a narrative to describe the nascent movement compared it to the Tea Party. And, for a hot minute, Occupy was the Tea Party of the left. The linchpin of this comparison is the assumption that both are grassroots movements calling out those in power. But Anthony DiMaggio's latest study, *The Rise of the Tea Party*, rejects the Tea Party as a movement and sets out to un-cloak its costume, calling it nothing more than a re-branding of the Republican Party.

The Rise of the Tea Party is DiMaggio's follow-up to *Crashing the Tea Party*, a searing takedown of this right-wing phenomenon. Much has changed since the Tea Party's emergence in the healthcare "town halls" in the summer of 2009. Obamacare has been upheld by the Supreme Court, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker with big-money backing eviscerated collective bargaining rights for most public workers, survived a heated recall election and presumptive Republican nominee Mitt Romney is seen as a moderate by the far-right.

All of this begs the question, what is the Tea Party?

As a grassroots movement, DiMaggio contends the Tea Party is a massive fraud, and there is little difference between self-described Tea Partiers and their conservative Republican counterparts.

For starters, DiMaggio finds that self-described Tea Party legislators' voting records are indistinguishable from their Republican colleagues. Local Tea Party chapters are generally inactive or nonexistent, and any party talking points are generated by moneyed Republican elites like Dick Armey's Freedom Works. DiMaggio reports that the 2010 Tea Party national gathering in Nashville, Tenn. was a complete failure, with headliners like Sarah Palin, who demanded an exorbitant speaking fee.

Further, local organizing efforts are anathema to Tea Partiers influenced by Ayn Rand's objectivist philosophy and disdain

of collective action DiMaggio writes. Rand, who wrote extensively against the Vietnam War protests and the Civil Rights movement, fetishized rugged individualism and commodified social relations in terms of time, money and what one could gain materially and emotionally from each interaction.

Widespread Ayn Rand worship has been part of the right for decades, but how does this explain large turnouts for the Tea Party's rallies in Washington, D.C., especially in the fall of 2010? According to DiMaggio, the powerful echo chamber of the conservative media, with Fox News superstar Glenn Beck's leadership, spurred people to attend.

The beginning of the book draws on Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky to offer readers a media theory primer that is both beneficial and a bit tedious — as anyone familiar with Chomsky's brilliant yet bone-dry style can attest. DiMaggio uses Chomsky's propaganda model (outlined in *Manufacturing Consent*) to explain that media corporations are motivated by profits, and thus, err on the side of pro-business coverage, especially when public-interest reporting threatens their bottom line. Without major corporate media backing, DiMaggio says, Tea Partiers are merely the same old aging and majority white Republican base.

Tea Party activists supported a corporatist agenda of deregulation and lowered income taxes for businesses and the rich while attacking the remnants of New Deal and liberal healthcare reform. Polling shows Tea Partiers are generally more affluent than average Americans, are predominantly white and mostly rely on the conservative media for their news.

This last point is the takeaway — as a result of over reliance on right-wing media, many Republicans often hold contradictory and ignorant beliefs. In a poll of voters in Alabama and Mississippi last March, 52 percent of respondents believed President Obama is Muslim — another 36 percent said they weren't sure. Further, many conservatives rely on government programs like the earned-income tax credit and free school lunches to make ends meet, while also calling for an end to government assistance.

This belief system is the *raison d'être* of the Tea Party.

— BENNETT BAUMER

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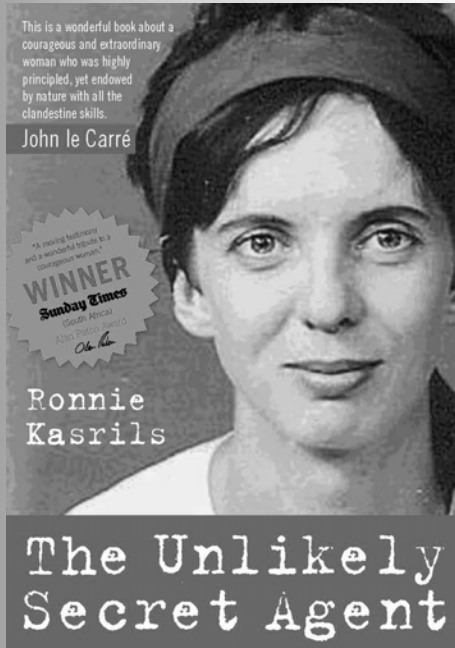
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REVIEW



What They Gain, What We Lose

The People's Pension: The Struggle to Defend Social Security Since Reagan

BY ERIC LAURSEN
AK PRESS, 2012

In the tumultuous political battles of the Great Depression, massive social movements and disruptive strikes forced the U.S. government to implement a series of major programs to ease the human impact of the country's economic woes. One of these programs — Social Security — offered an alternative vision that allowed workers to save money and retire in relative comfort.

Eric Laursen's *The People's Pension* begins nearly half a century after the creation of the program, with the emergence of a coordinated movement to attack Social Security. Since the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, conservative politicians, think tanks and foundations have waged a steady battle to discredit, cut or dramatically transform the program. Labor unions and senior citizens' groups led a broad movement that has largely succeeded in defending Social Security.

The People's Pension covers in minute detail the specific politicians, lobbyists and organizations that have acted against Social Security over the last three decades. The book is massive, with a total of 818 pages and an unfortunate over-emphasis on the

activities of Washington insiders.

In many respects, though, the book is a significant accomplishment. Written by an independent journalist and distributed by an anarchist publisher, *The People's Pension* is a formidable piece of research, and its coherent, readable narrative is a gift to activists and scholars alike. In his closing chapter, Laursen even takes an admirable stab at demonstrating the relevance of anarchist concepts of mutual aid and popular direct democracy in bolstering the movement to save Social Security and public benefits.

Laursen consistently and thoroughly demonstrates that Social Security, despite conservative rhetoric, is not broken, not about to go bankrupt and not necessarily in need of a massive overhaul. Social Security functions remarkably well and has helped millions of people make ends meet. “Social Security,” Laursen writes, “had by 1980 evolved into the most successful antipoverty program in U.S. history.”

Laursen is particularly astute in his extensive analysis of the hype around generational rivalry. In these narratives, “greedy geezers” are stealing the wealth of today's young workers. This rhetoric emphasizes generational divides to promote fear and reactionary politics. Social Security, Laursen convincingly argues, should be heralded as a system of solidarity and care between generations.

The People's Pension is much weaker, however, in demonstrating why conservatives have put so much effort into attacking such a popular program. Laursen attributes these attacks to a combination of self-interest and ideology, but he is consistently vague about

what business elites stand to gain. He alludes to a few possible causes, including fear of future taxes and the potential windfall of investment fees for the financial services industry if Social Security is privatized, but he fails to examine these claims any further.

Both austerity cuts to Social Security and privatization have a rational economic logic for business elites. But by failing to examine the underlying economic impetus for attacking Social Security, Laursen mislabels the problem in his closing chapter as one of bureaucrats removed from public concerns. Laursen's chief solution — democratizing the management of Social Security — could never be successful without confronting the power of employers in American society.

As documented throughout *The People's Pension*, labor unions and social movements have largely relied on lobbying, electoral politics and symbolic protests to defend public benefits. We need to go beyond the halls of Congress to fight back in our workplaces, to disrupt the profit of corporations, to build militant organizations of workers and the poor, and to develop solutions to the economic crisis that make banks and corporations pay.

Michelle O'Brien is a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at New York University, studying the politics of welfare.

A longer version of this review will appear on The Rank-and-Filer, a political blog for radical social service workers, at rankandfiler.net.

— MICHELLE O'BRIEN

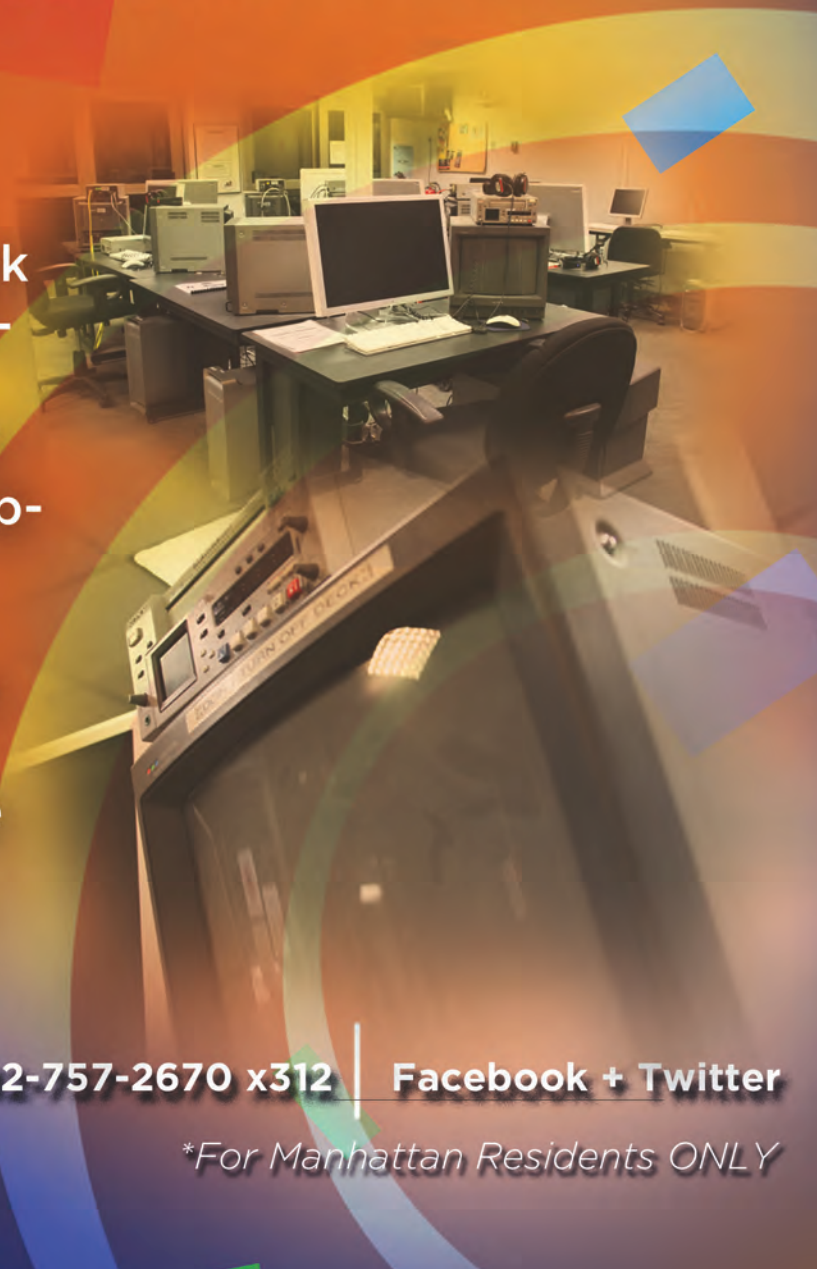
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